

EDUCATION DAILY

The education community's independent daily news service

Paige Will Only Consider Unanimous Title IX Planks

Acting far more quickly than expected, Education Secretary Rod Paige said late Wednesday he would not consider many of the more controversial changes proposed for Title IX by a committee appointed to examine the law requiring gender equity in sports.

Paige said he would only consider suggestions that had unanimous support from the 15-member Commission on Opportunity in Athletics, which gave Paige a report Wednesday listing recommendations on how Title IX can be improved (ED, Feb. 27).

"I am pleased that the commission, made up of a diverse group of individuals with vastly different points of view, was able to agree on some important recommendations, and the department intends to move forward only on those recommendations," he said in a written statement.

Off The Table

The ideas scrapped by Paige include: giving schools more leeway to accept private funding for sports teams; surveying high school and college students to gauge their interest in sports; and letting schools exclude older "non-traditional" students and "walk-on" athletes when calculating the male/female ratio of athletes.

Of the 23 suggestions by the committee, 15 were unanimous. They include asking the Education Department to: "aggressively enforce Title IX standards"; provide clear guidelines on how schools can comply with the law; and clarify that cutting teams to show compliance with Title IX is a "disfavored practice."

The committee's report was shrouded in controversy as two of the commission members broke away from the group at the last minute and gave Paige a "minority report" asking him to maintain current Title IX standards.

(more on p. 3)

In This Issue

Vol. 36, No. 40 ■ Friday, February 28, 2003

Gates Foundation To Fund
Alternative Schools Page 3

States: Vocational Training Policy
Must Link With Skills Standards..... Page 4

ED Clarifies Faith Groups' Role In After-School Grants

The Education Department yesterday updated guidance for the federal after-school grant program, clarifying that faith-based organizations can receive the grants but cannot use them to advance religion.

The 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative provides grants to support after-school programs. Formerly a competitive grant program, it now funnels money to states on a formula basis, and states then offer competitive sub-grants to local schools and organizations.

The non-regulatory guidance, which updates a May 2002 draft, specifies that religious groups can receive grants under the program.

Guidance Cuts Both Ways

But ED notes that local grantees cannot discriminate on the basis of religion, or conduct religious activities. By the same token, state education agencies cannot discriminate against religious groups applying for grants.

"Thus, faith-based and community-based organizations are encouraged to apply for local grants on the same basis as other applicants," the guidance states.

"Funds shall be used solely for the purposes set forth in this program," it adds. "No funds (more on p. 2)

ED Clarifies Faith Groups' Role In After-School Grants (cont.)

provided pursuant to this program shall be expended to support religious practices, such as religious instruction, worship or prayer.”

Previously, only public schools or local school districts could be direct grant recipients under the program. Now, states can award funds to a broader range of organizations, including religious groups and private schools.

The guidance was updated to address the way certain civil rights laws apply to religious groups receiving the after-school grants, an ED spokeswoman said.

The guidance also outlines changes to the program under the No Child Left Behind Act. They include: an increased focus on academics; targeting services to high-poverty and low-performing schools; limiting services to students and their adult family members, rather than offering programs for the broader community; and using research-based activities.

The program, a Clinton administration initiative, mushroomed from a \$40 million pilot program in 1998 to a \$1 billion competitive grant program by 2002.

But recent research has called its effectiveness into question. A federally funded study released earlier this month found that the programs yielded only small academic gains for participating students, and did not make children feel safer (ED, Feb. 5).

Citing those findings, President Bush seeks in his fiscal 2004 budget request to scale back the program by \$400 million (ED, Feb. 4). ED research officials say they want to investigate what makes after-school programs effective before maintaining the funding.

Access the guidance on the ED Web site, www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/asst.html. Click on “NCLB Policy Guidance and OMB Circulars,” then “Policy Guidance for Programs Im-

plemented Under the No Child Left Behind Act.”

—Hannah Gladfelter Rubin

Funding Notebook

■ The Education Department's Office of Post-secondary Education is holding a meeting March 7 to garner public comment on the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (*Federal Register*, Feb. 11).

The meeting will take place in Kansas City, Mo., during the annual Federal Student Aid spring meeting. Requests to speak during the hearing will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis.

Contact: Amy Raaf, (202)502-7561; or Dan Iannicola, Jr., (202) 502-7719; e-mail, (preferred) HEA2004@ed.gov; www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister.

■ One of the education improvement initiatives that the State Farm Companies Foundation supports is the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards.

NBPTS seeks to maintain rigorous standards for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do, providing a national voluntary system certifying teachers who meet these standards.

The State Farm grant of \$300,000 is being used for a scholarship program to cover \$2,000 of the \$2,300 certification fee for teachers in Los Angeles Unified School District and El Paso, Socorro and Ysleta, Texas, Independent School Districts; as well as to fund a leadership program to promote NBPST certification in selected areas of the country.

Contact: For more information, access NBPTS' updated Web site at www.nbpts.org.

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Gates Foundation Plans To Fund Alternative Schools

Concerned that the nation's secondary system isn't appropriately serving large segments of the population, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is footing the bill to strengthen a network of alternative high schools that provide smaller learning environments

Ultimately, the foundation wants to raise the overall graduation rate for black and Hispanic students by 40 percent in five years, a goal a Gates official says can be accomplished by at least partially supporting as many as 10,000 alternative schools over the next decade.

The foundation announced Wednesday that it is providing \$31 million to nonprofits around the country to support a network of 168 alternative schools that will serve some 36,000 students.

That figure is in addition to the \$375 million it has already committed to other programs.

"Nearly one-third of American students aren't graduating from high school. This represents nothing short of a massive failure of America's high schools," said Tom Vander Ark, executive director of education for the Gates Foundation. "The good news is that we can reverse this trend. More students will succeed if communities provide a rich variety of education options, and effective alternative schools are such an option."

The Gates Foundation notes that graduation rates across the nation have stagnated, with research from the Manhattan Institute indicating that as many as 1 million students per class are lost from ninth to 12th grades.

That figure is even higher for minority students, with only about half of blacks and Latinos receiving a high school diploma.

The grants will go to nine nonprofit groups that represent a variety of philosophies and backgrounds. However, Carol Rava Treat, deputy director of education at the foundation, said they all have a common goal: helping those often ignored by the traditional education system graduate and succeed.

The foundation also hopes the funding will help provide college access to the students,

many of whom have never considered higher education an option.

Common Elements

Foundation officials note that research from Jobs for the Future, a Boston-based educational research and advocacy group, found that highly effective schools embody similar elements, including emphasizing academic rigor and fostering interpersonal relationships, and are often smaller and more personal than traditional high schools.

YouthBuild USA, a nonprofit group that helps troubled youths get an education and build career skills, will be receiving \$5.4 million from the Gates Foundation, which it will use to evaluate and strengthen 23 existing alternative schools, and also create 10 new ones.

The group will allow other nonprofits to make proposals for the 10 new schools, although the timeline for a request-for-proposal isn't yet clear.

This funding offers the groups 33 local programs an opportunity to have additional resources available to work on initiatives that are the "life blood" of YouthBuild: stronger standards, professional development and other innovations they hadn't been able to implement before due to funding constraints, said Tim Cross, the group's vice president of field operations.

—Travis Hicks

Paige Rejects Split Title IX Suggestions (Cont. from p. 1)

That move was supported by various women's rights groups, which are still concerned that the remaining recommendations may hinder girls' opportunities in athletics.

"The recommendations are unclearly worded and could be interpreted in ways that undercut participation opportunities and scholarship dollars for women and girls, as well as other Title IX protections," a statement by the National Women's Law Center said.

—Alana Keynes

States: Voc Training Policy Must Jibe With Skills Standards

Perkins Act May Provide Test To Use Skills Framework As Accountability Measure

With industry-based skills standards for vocational training gaining a foothold, state officials say federal policy and funding should complement—rather than inhibit—efforts to use a skills framework as an accountability measure.

As Congress begins efforts to reauthorize several laws with vocational-training components—including the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families—it should consider ways states and localities have used industry-based skills standards as a common measure of accountability, state officials said at a Feb. 21 policy forum in Washington, D.C.

If states are moving toward using a system of industry-based skills standards, assessments and certifications to bridge the gap between workforce development and workplace needs, then federal funding must supplement those endeavors, Emil Jezik, Kentucky's commissioner of technical education told the forum.

"It takes a lot of time and money to really get this thing rolling," he stressed.

Perkins Act Measure

Industry-based skills standards are a perfect method for accountability, especially in Perkins, although the language in the law doesn't specifically spell that out, said Jezik, recommending that language be added to strengthen accountability when the law is reauthorized.

"As the law stands now, the interpretation [of Perkins] is so vast that you could use GPAs to measure accountability," he said.

Using national skills standards in career and technical education programs is a "win-win" situation—the accountability is built in, said Leo Reddy, CEO of the National Coalition of Advanced Manufacturing, who has worked to develop advanced manufacturing national skills standards and assessments for years.

With the national skills standards finally complete, Reddy said the certification exams should be ready in May and will be piloted at the Milwaukee Area Technical College.

Without congressional support, however, states could be forced to sacrifice high standards to meet current federal accountability measures.

For instance, New Jersey's strict skills standards programs—stretching across the state's labor and education departments—count only nationally recognized diplomas, degrees and certificates, which makes meeting federal measures, such as degree attainment, difficult.

In response, the state has considered watering down its credentialing process so as to not risk the loss of federal funding, a move that Dave Novak, senior policy analyst for the New Jersey's employment and training commission, called "ridiculous." Right now, it's almost impossible for New Jersey to meet WIA levels for credentialing attainment because the state took the "high road" from the get-go, he said.

However, "anything less than what employers demand should be unsatisfactory," Novak noted.

How To Demonstrate Progress?

One problem advocates may face is that it's difficult to demonstrate the progress states have made using industry-based skills standards because substantive data aren't yet available, Jezik said.

States can currently only offer data from the late 1990s, only a couple of years after the last Perkins reauthorization in 1997, and not far enough removed from that implementation to be very informative.

And state interest continues to grow. Edie West, executive director of the National Skills Standards Board (NSSB), said roughly 60 percent of states are moving toward using an industry-based skills standards approach to their career and technical education programs, but NSSB is currently working with 48 states in some capacity.

The idea is "very prevalent," and the conversation now hinges on specific implementation rather than on debating the theory and potential benefit of industry skills, said West.

—Travis Hicks